



TOGETHER WE ARE ABLE
School Inclusion Education Program

STEP 2: Inclusive Play Day Guide

- Inclusive Play Day Description
- Buddy Tips for Inclusive Play
- Autism at Play
- Ice-Breakers & Games

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GETTING THE INCLUSIVE PLAY DAY STARTED

Core Learning Objectives:

- Gain awareness of abilities through play-based interaction
- Learn a variety of communication techniques (non-verbal, play, facial expressions)
- Exercise soft skills (observation, listening, creative problem solving)
- Have fun!

The day has arrived! The interactive play day is exciting for everyone, but children with typical abilities who have never really interacted with people with disabilities may be nervous. Let them continue to ask questions in the classroom before you meet your buddies. Go over the BUDDY Handout again prior to the play date to refresh their memories. For buddies who have disabilities, go over the day, the routine, and try to connect them to their play partners ahead of time.

The interactive play experience can happen in two ways:

1. **At an inclusive playground**
2. **On your school campus** (If you have both, we strongly recommend the community playground. The newness of the setting can create some fantastic connections for both sets of children.)

Note: You may have an inclusive playground closer than you think!

Please visit the following playground finder to check:

<http://apps.npr.org/playgrounds/search.html>



At an Inclusive Playground:

If your community has an inclusive playground, it is the ideal setting to encourage students to explore each other's abilities. The playground transforms into a classroom as children see, for the first time, their peer as a peer vs. stopping at their disability.

Step 1: Planning Your Trip

As you know already, there are many things to consider when planning a field trip. For this particular experience, we recommend considering the following points:

- **Timing:** The field trip typically takes 3 to 4 hours, depending on how far your school is from the play space. Allow enough time for bus loading/unloading that will still give the students a healthy amount of time to connect and play.
- **Schedule:** We recommend creating a schedule of the day that balances free play and organized activities. Free play is an essential element for social connection, while scheduling one or two organized activities allows the students to reconnect and focus back on each other.
- **Supplies:** A list of recommended supplies is below. Any combination that provides variety is beneficial. At the playground, we set up them up in play stations and allow the students to choose what they engage with. Bubble zones, sand toys, music box, etc.
- **Transportation:** Encourage the students (who don't require accessible transportation) to sit with their buddies on the way to and home from the park.
- **Lunch:** We encourage students with and without disabilities to stay connected during lunch. If at all possible, let them eat together. If a student requires a protocol (tube feeding), explain it to their peers, with that student's permission. Once they understand how it works, they won't be as intimidated about the differences.
- **Parent Volunteers:** We encourage parent participation but recommend structuring it as follows:
 - Some of the ideal roles that parents can play include: helping direct traffic at accessible swings, supervising playground perimeters, organizing lunch, introducing toys/group activities. Giving them structured activities is more productive than directly interacting with their children's buddy group.
 - Children naturally look to adults to model behavior. Please ask participating parents to review the buddy guidelines that are given to your students. This includes helpful hints like speaking directly to a child with disabilities and refraining from asking potentially uncomfortable questions in front of that child, such as: "What is wrong with her?"

Step 2: Supporting the Interaction

As you pair students together and introduce them, consider how to set the tone for their first interaction:

- **Model the behavior you want to see.** Introduce yourself to the child with a disability, even if he/she is non-verbal and ask your students to introduce themselves. Find out a little about who that child is (age, likes/dislikes) and remember to treat that student like any other. Reach out and shake/touch their hand so your students see that contact is o.k.
- **Get down to the level of the student and make eye contact.** If your students are bigger than their buddies, ask them to do the same.
- **Strive for a 2:1 ratio.** Two students with typical abilities with one student with a disability. One-to-one works but can be overwhelming, as can 3:1.
- **Start the interaction play experience with the student with a disabilities favorite activity** to create a sense of comfort (especially if a new location/rhythm is hard for that student).
- **Explain medical procedures/physical differences** in bite-sized easy words that normalize them.
- **Explain sensory differences** (touch/sound sensitivity) in easy ways that help the students catch a glimpse of what that might feel like.



On Your School Campus:

Step 1: Transform Your School into an Inclusive Playground

Shane's Inspiration utilizes our playgrounds as our classrooms, but if you do not have an inclusive playground available in your community, you can create one right on your campus!

- **Identify an area** of the campus that is accessible and easily transformed for play (partially contained so that the interactive play day can be managed but still allowing for room to move).
- **Ideally, choose a space that offers multiple types of play** (swinging, jumping, climbing, and quieter play)
- **Bring out the toys:** balls, bubbles, musical instruments that are easy to grasp, books, play dough, wind toys (anything simple that provides a variety of sight/sound/touch stimulation). A variety of sensory experiences supports the multiple needs of students with disabilities. It also adds as an incentive for the students to engage with each other, making recess time special.
- **Sensory over-stimulation is a factor for some children on the Autism Spectrum.** Consider having a quiet section of your play area that is set aside from the main location. This allows students to take a break from all of the sounds/sights/movement. Even pitching a children's tent near your play area can create a cozy quiet space.
- **Keep the numbers of children interacting small to avoid staff and student overwhelm.** Consider ½ a general education class interacting with a special education class. You can rotate the students in each week.



Step 2: Timing and Scheduling

Schools have found success integrating during morning recess or have opted for longer interaction during lunch. If it is easy for you, it is easier to sustain!

If **integrated recess** is optimum, here are a few tips to maximize the time:

- **Choose a location easily reached.** The students will have approximately 15 minutes together, given travel to and from the classroom. This allows you to make the most of a short period.
- **Buddy the students ahead of time.** Review who you have and decide who would be best with each other. For the students with disabilities, if they aren't exposed to their peers often, they can see pictures of their peers ahead of time to ease the transition.
- **Keep the play options more limited.** Offering bubbles and books is plenty for a shorter duration. You can switch out the items offered to maintain variety.
- **For the first experience** (or first few) engage in ice-breakers so the students get to know each other. There are a few listed at the end of this section.
- **Make it a regular play date!** Create Fun Fridays, where you offer a simple activity each week for the students. It could be the play elements, an easy craft, or bigger physical activity like a relay race. This gives your students with and without disabilities incentive to play and engage, providing ongoing social interaction.

If **recess/lunch** is optimum, consider:

- **Split the time in half, with play first and eating second.** The play will allow the students to work off any nervousness that may exist and connect socially.
- **Maintain buddies during lunch.** Even if the students with disabilities eat differently, this allows them to connect in the most social, common way.
- **As mentioned above, keep a variety of activities** and consider offering an ice-breaker for the first few.

List of Supplies:

Here's a list of some of our favorite toy tools to help support interaction, sensory processing, and communication:

- **Toys with textures:** bumpy balls (squeezable balls that fit in the hands or slightly larger), bean bags, dancing scarves, musical instruments with different textures.
- **Bubbles:** these are great for kids and adults of all ages!
- **Balls of different sizes:** softer, bigger balls are great on a play surface, soccer, basketball, and smaller squeazy balls. We typically direct ball play to an adjacent grassy/accessible area.
- **Musical instruments** with a variety of tones (low to high) and some that you can attach to wrists for kids with a limited ability to grasp. Look at Lakeshore Learning Center's wrist and ankle bells as an example:
<http://products.lakeshorelearning.com/learning/Musical-Instruments>
- **Games:** parachute, ice-breakers, drum circles – keep in mind they will need to be physically and developmentally adapted.
- **Books** to allow for quiet play.
- **Arts & crafts:** easy to hold crayons and pens as well as butcher paper—a great way to occupy buddies who want to slow down and catch their breath.

If you are a special education teacher and have children with sensory challenges or Autism, consider bringing familiar objects from the classroom to help navigate the stress caused by the environment and/or change in the routine.



Buddying Suggestions:

Prior to buddying the children together, consider the following preparations:

1. Work with your partner teacher ahead of time to identify **which students will pair well together**. Consider who is more active vs. passive and who is more naturally empathetic and capable of supporting/interacting with a child with more complex needs.
2. If possible, **have the buddies meet a few times before the interactive play date** to familiarize themselves with each other. Arrange in-class time where the students work on a craft together, play music with each other, read to each other, etc.
3. **Identify any needs** that will be helpful for the buddies to know about each other prior to playing, such as:
 - Are there any medical needs that your students need to be aware of (seizures etc.)?
 - Are there any students coming who are over sensitive to touch? If yes, your students should be instructed to communicate via voice or play. For more information, see the Autism at Play section below.
 - Are there students who are not used to being paired one-on-one or in large groups who might need extra support from a para-professional?
 - Are there students who are vision-impaired who need the buddy to act as a sighted guide? Or students who have limited hearing?

INQUIRING MINDS WANT TO KNOW...

FREQUENTLY ASKED STUDENT QUESTIONS

Many students share the same concerns and unknowns when it comes to engaging for the first time with their peers with disabilities. If you would like to elaborate on the BUDDY Hints handout, here are some talking points for your students.

Children Using Wheelchairs and Mobility Supports

Should I just start pushing?

No. His wheelchair is essential to your buddy. Treat it respectfully and ask before you push. And your buddy may be able to push himself, especially if he uses an electric wheelchair. If your buddy does need help, we will show you where the breaks on the wheelchair are, when to use them, and what the play speed limit is (we usually say a mild to fast walk).

How do I say hello to someone using a wheelchair?

Get down to his eye level to say hi and introduce yourself. It is a way of showing respect, and it also makes your buddy not have to strain his or her neck to look at you.

Should I stay behind my buddy's wheelchair when we play?

No! He'll never be able to see you and get to know you. Make sure you have time playing in front of and next to your buddy. It will let him see your face and play with you vs. being pushed around all day.

Can I put my buddy in the swing?

Some buddies may have special equipment that connects them to their wheelchairs. Always ask your buddy's teacher or helper to lift your buddy out of the chair into the swings. Don't do this yourself.

What can my buddy play on?

Let's find out! If your buddy can't use his words, we will ask his teacher. But we will also find out by playing together.

What do I call my buddy?

Use the People First Rule. If you have a buddy with a disability, should you call him my disabled buddy? Your buddy wants to be seen as a person first, who happens to have a physical challenge. It is more respectful to say buddy with a disability, because you put him first and his disability second. Or what else could you call him...what about his name?

Can I use regular words like run, even though my buddy may not be able to do those things?

Yes! People in wheelchairs use those words too. What you want to avoid are questions like: “What’s wrong with your legs?” Or “What’s wrong with my buddy?” We know you are curious, but those questions don’t feel good to the person being asked.

What should I do for my buddy to help him?

Watch, use good observation skills like a detective. If your buddy is struggling or looks like he needs help, ask if you can help him. Don’t assume anything about your buddy’s abilities. Discover what your buddy can do!

Children Who Are Non-Verbal or Have Limited Verbal Skills

Some of you may be playing with buddies who communicate differently. Some may not be able to use words, some might. It may take some longer to respond to your words. There are various disabilities that make talking a challenge, like Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, and Autism. Here are some things to consider if you have a buddy who has challenges communicating with words:

How do I talk to my buddy?

Just use a normal voice and speak the way you would with any of your friends. Shake his hand and say hello, just like you would with anyone. Share who you are and talk about what interests you. It may feel odd at first, if you have a buddy who doesn’t speak, but remember that your buddy wants to get to know you.

- **Avoiding open-ended questions to help your buddy answer the questions.** Example: Where do you want to go play? vs. Do you want to go play on the swings? Asking questions that are direct might make it easier for your buddy to find the words to answer you with.
- **Be a good detective, if your buddy can’t speak.** How will you know where your buddy wants to play? Observe his face, sounds, hand gestures, etc. How does he react on the swings? Playing musical instruments?
- **You can ask your buddy to repeat himself, if you need to.** It isn’t rude. Ask your buddy to repeat and/or slow down so you can understand him.
- **Communicate through play!** Try talking to your buddy in his/her language. Remember that actions can speak loudly...a hug, throwing a ball, helping your buddy hold a drum and banging on it together, blowing bubbles. Laughter and play are the best way to communicate.

Children Who Have Autism or Sensory Processing Disorders

Who here knows someone with Autism? It is a really common disability, and despite our researchers being very smart, people still can’t agree on what causes it. But it affects how the brain works, how it processes the senses...what are our five senses?

Noises, smells, light, touch, and sound can overwhelm people with Autism. But here's another important thing to remember. Autism affects everyone in a different way. Some people might be really sensitive to touch, some might not be able to feel light touches. Some people might be sensitive to sound, others not at all.

What if my buddy doesn't want to play with me?

Sometimes, people with Autism have a hard time making eye contact, speaking, and being social. Who here is shy? Imagine that feeling times 100. It can make places like lunch rooms or playgrounds pretty overwhelming. If you have a buddy who is struggling, here are a few things you can do:

- Find out what his **favorite place to play is or favorite type of activity and start there**. Starting with something familiar might make him feel more comfortable.
- Start in a **quiet place** where there are fewer people, less noise (by a tree reading a book). Find out what sounds your buddy likes (musical instruments, songs) and create those sounds.
- Be patient and **play side-by-side** for a little while. If your buddy moves, stay with him. The more you are around, the more he will trust and open up.
- If your buddy has a hard time with eye contact, try playing side-by-side and **mirroring his movements**. If he starts to draw, you draw as well. If he is clapping and making a rhythm, grab a drum (or use your hands) and gently join him. That lets a buddy who has no words to communicate with know that you are speaking his language.

What if I do something wrong that upsets my buddy?

If your buddy seems upset, we will get his teacher and find out why. If you let your buddy explore the play day at his pace, in his own way, it will be less overwhelming for him. And remember that crying or getting upset is a way to communicate without words. It isn't something you've done wrong.

Don't forget to play! It is the best way to connect and communicate.

AUTISM AT PLAY:

TIPS FOR SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH SENSORY PROCESSING DISORDERS

While inclusive play and playgrounds benefit all children, for children on the Autism Spectrum or with Sensory Processing Disorder, these high-impact environments can be a real challenge. The intensity of sensory input can quickly cause a child to deregulate (lack of ability to control responses to stimuli) and result in challenging behaviors. But every behavior is a communication! Here are some common triggers, what they might communicate, and suggestions to help support re-regulation:

Sound Sensitivity

Why: De-regulation in response to sound is varied and can be triggered by specific sounds like a squeaky swing or lawn mower or a wall of ambient noise on the playground.

What: You may see children with their fingers pressed into their ears, staying on the periphery of the playground, or engaging in verbal outbreaks (yelling, tantrums).

Try: Identify sounds/songs that are soothing and part of their daily routine; direct the buddies to a quieter place (trees/grassy area, underneath the play structure, inside a crawl tunnel); provide sound protection (headphones, pitch a small tent as a buffer); identify a peer interested in quieter games; allow the buddies to play separately while others are engaged in a group activity.



Physical Space is Too Open

- Why:** A large open-ended space such as a playground or school yard can lack physical boundaries for some children, causing overwhelm and a feeling of not being able to locate their bodies in space.
- What:** Children experiencing this often run in loops around the play space, typically on the periphery. This helps gain control of the physical environment and experience.
- Try:** Consider setting up play zones that differentiate the space and provide borders (sand zone, bubble zone, ball zone); identify a peer buddy to engage in specific familiar activities (playing drums, throwing a tactile ball); allow the child on the play space before the others to adjust to the environment.

Over-Sensitive to Touch

- Why:** Light or unanticipated touches can feel unbearable due to over-sensitivity. Children can also react negatively to specific textures (sand, types of clothing).
- What:** Children typically push/pull away when touched and can sometimes respond aggressively to touch (hitting/scratching), need to cover their bodies, and have difficulty standing too close to others.
- Try:** Help their peers understand why the child responds to touch that way so that they understand the physical cues; teach them to approach the child so that he can see them and give a firmer touch on a part of the body like the forearm; make sure peers make eye contact



Under-Sensitive to Touch

Why: Physical touch doesn't register easily for children who are hypo-sensitive. Their bodies seek physical stimulation due to reduced sensitivity in their brain to process input.

What: Students tend to make big movements (swinging, jumping, clapping, stomping) or loud noises. They may continually touch others and objects to register physical stimulation and squeeze down on objects to get pressure.

Try: Find out what sensations sooth the child (deep hugs, firm hand squeezes, weighted backpacks/heavy sweatshirts for pressure); keep the student directed towards big play activities (swings, jumpers, body peddlers, playing ball and running); create a small peer group (2-3 students) of active kids and engage in higher impact games.

Communication Differences

Why: Children who are emerging verbal communicators (speech delay, echolalia, reliance on verbal scripts) can become frustrated with highly-verbal peers as they are not able to keep up with the pace of communication.

What: Children can communicate frustration by physically (hitting/scratching themselves/throwing sand) or in verbal tantrums (yelling/repeated phrases).

Try: Remind peers that there are many ways to communicate and encourage non-verbal interaction through toys (balls, musical instruments, etc.); utilize ability awareness activities that encourage understanding of communication differences; identify a mature play buddy to engage one-on-one; avoid open-ended questions and encourage peers to ask specific questions (yes/no).

ICEBREAKERS

Movement Name Game

(found in Playworks 2011-2012 Manual)

Before You Start: Have everyone stand (or sit if using chairs) in a big circle. Demonstrate how to speak loudly while doing a movement. Have everyone repeat your name and movement.

How to Play: Ask a volunteer to begin. He/she has to come up with a unique movement and say his/her name while the group repeats both the name and movement. Repeat until everyone has had a turn. During the second round, ask the students to come up with a new movement, say their name again, and one thing unique to them. "My name is Aaron and I can play the piano."

If you are playing with students who are non-verbal and/or have limited movement, ask their teachers or paraprofessionals to step in and help him/her create a movement, name, and fact about the student.

When you pair up the buddies, ask the students who meet each other to repeat the other's movement, name, and fact.

Name Game / Guess The Animal | Zoo At The Playground

Before You Start: Get the buddy pairs into groups of 4 to 5 students, combining the students with and without disabilities.

How to Play: Gather the students into a large group (either a circle or just in the lunch area where they are sitting). Once you get them into their groups, have them decide on an animal that they want to create. They can use their bodies, equipment, movement, gestures, noises, etc. Once they have decided, have the groups get up one at a time and create their animals. The rest of the group has to guess what they are. When the animal has been guessed, the buddy group then introduces themselves to the rest of the group (name, age, favorite food).

Because this is done in buddy groups, there should not be any limitations, as buddies and support staff can help students who are limited physically and/

or verbally to participate. Children can be creative in how to visually create the images of animals using what they have... it can be as simple as a “meow” rather than crawling on the ground for a cat...

Look-Up

Before You Start: Gather the students into a circle. This game encourages everyone to become comfortable with the group without verbal interaction, stressing listening skills. The game works best in groups of 10 to 20 students. The game will not work if students are hearing impaired and does require the ability to follow simple directions.

How to Play: The group gets in a circle of more than 6 less than 20 people... all in circle begin with heads down... one person outside of the circle is the caller and yells “1-2-3-Look Up!!” upon which all people in circle raise heads and must pick a person in the circle to look at... if two people in circle are making direct eye contact upon looking up... they are out...

Who’s Got The Beat?

Before You Start: This calm guessing game is helpful to draw in students who like rhythms and repetition. Gather everyone into a sitting position in a circle. Gather and hand out simple music instruments like egg shakers. If students have a hard time grasping or manipulating their instruments, have them work with buddies who are typically developing.

How to Play: Designate one student (or start with an adult to demonstrate) as the guesser, and ask that person to leave the circle while you establish a leader in the circle. He or she will start simple beat that the rest of the group follows. Bring the guesser back, as the leader continues to change the beat and the circle follow. The guesser tries to figure out who the leader is as the beats change beat leader.

People To People

Before You Start: The goal of this exercise is to become acquainted and comfortable being close to new/different people. Gather the group in a large circle. Divide them into groups of 5 to 8 students, mixing students with and without disabilities in the groups.

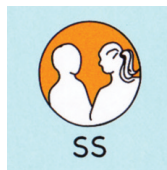
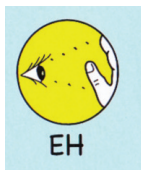
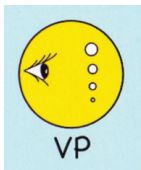
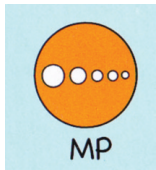
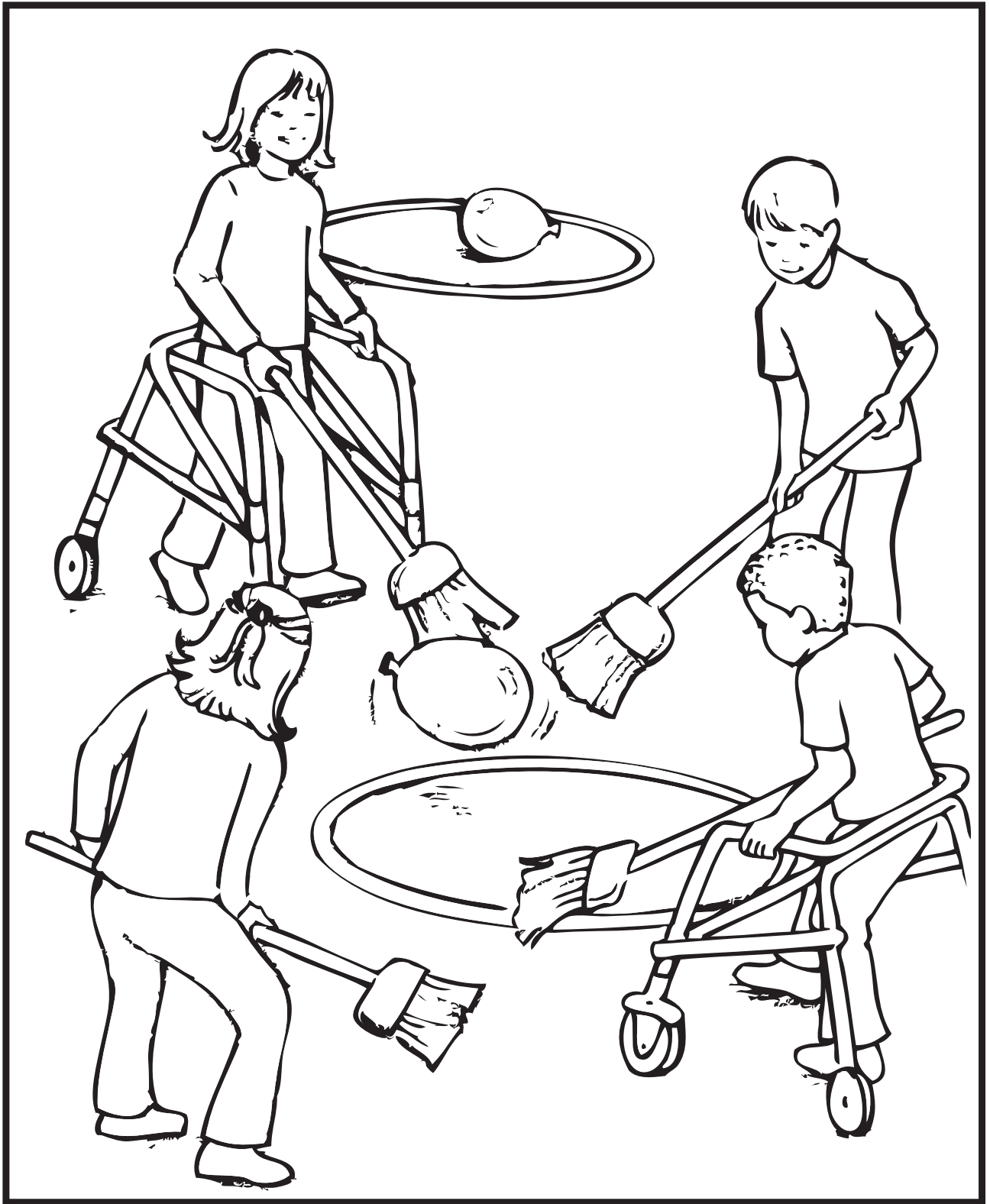
How to Play: Gather the buddy groups into a circle, with one buddy group in the middle. The group in middle calls out one body part to another ex: “hand to hand” and gives time for everyone to follow the directions and do that. They then give another command slightly more difficult, such as “toe to knee.” After calling out two to five times they call out “people to people.” The buddy pair must tap a new buddy group in the middle had to be the caller.

This can be done with students with physical challenges. Example: if someone calls toe to knee, the student who is ambulatory can bend their knee to the student who uses a wheelchair.

Middle of the Road

Before You Start: This activity will help the buddies learn more about what they share in common, in a physical, nonverbal way. It does require, for children with mobility issues, some help transitioning from one side of the road to the other. This can be done via buddy pairing. Establish two sides and a middle of a road. You can use ropes, cones, or even just leaves.

How to Play: After boundaries have been established for a side of A and B or “middle of the road” (meaning that they like both, neither, or have no opinion,) a facilitator calls out two items ex: “chocolate or vanilla ice cream” indicating with their hands which side is chocolate and which side is vanilla. The students move to whichever side they prefer or they stay in the middle if they have no preference. Continue calling out topics that vary (music, subjects at school, sports, activities, etc.)



BALLOON HOCKEY

Materials: Medium sized ball or balloon, tape or hula-hoops

Description: Set up several targets—put tape on the floor or use hula-hoops – and use ‘hockey sticks’ (brooms) to try to get a balloon or medium sized ball into the target areas. With multiple children, make teams and play a game of hockey.

Tips:

1. Designate the different targets to have different point values.
2. For pre-academic skills, you can have the children aim for the different goals by color, number, or words that are written inside of the target area.



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BOX BOWLING

Materials: Ball, small objects, box

Description: Set up 'bowling pins' on the floor, using action figures, plastic bottles or other small objects. Have your child roll a mediumsized ball towards the 'pins'. To help guide the direction of the ball, use a box that is open on each end for him to roll it through. If your child is in a wheelchair, balance the box on his lap so the ball falls and rolls in the right direction.

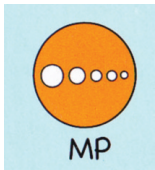
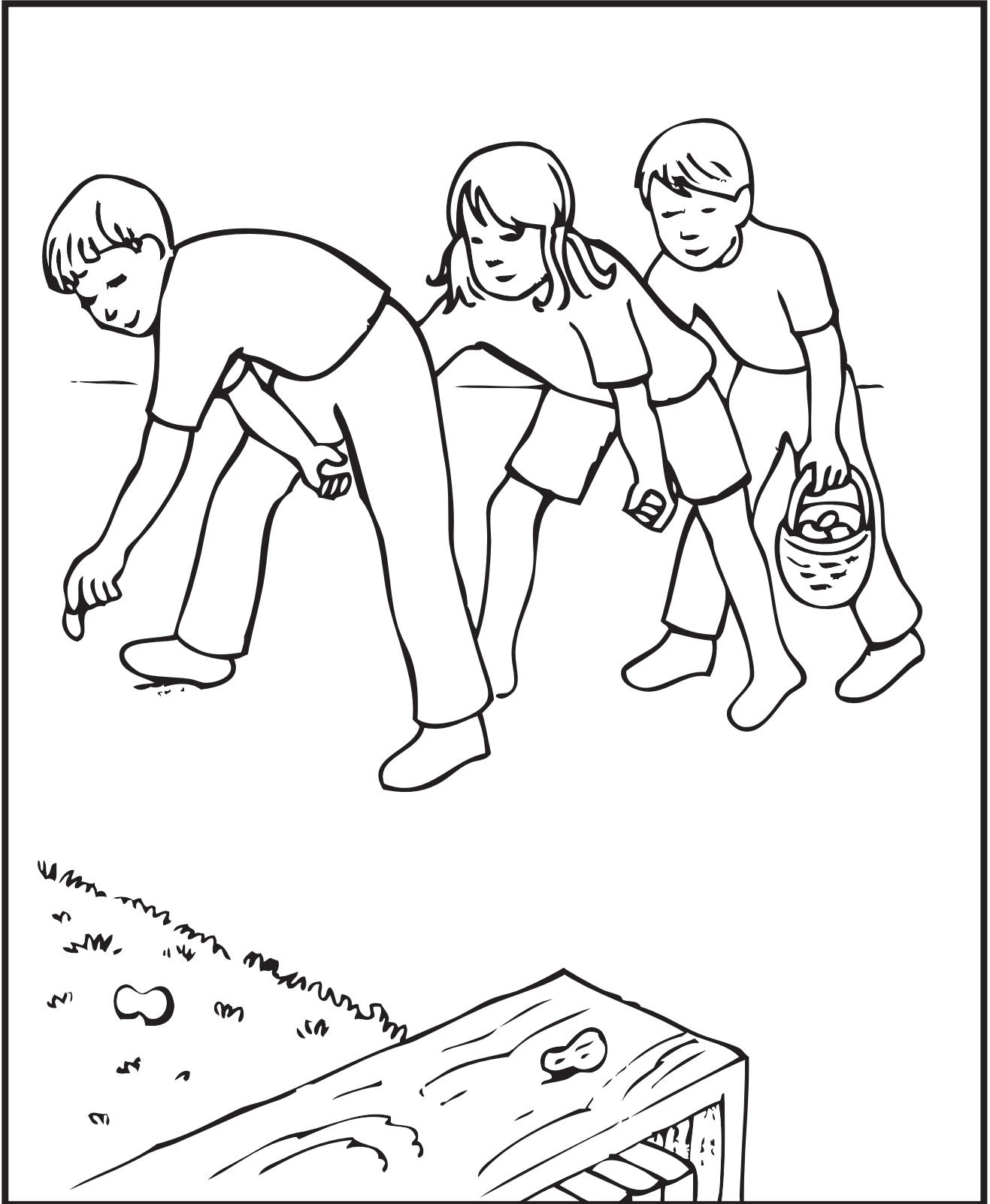
- Tips:**
1. Decorate the box and keep it as the 'bowling box'.
 2. If the ball is hard to hold on to, use putty or other materials to add notches to the ball; it may roll a little funny, but that will just add to the fun!



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ELEPHANT FIND

Group Size: 2+

Materials: Paper (peanuts), basket/bag

Description: Divide the kids into groups of about 3-5. They stand with one hand going under their own legs as the person behind them holds the hand of the person in front. They search for their “peanuts” around the room. The leader wraps the line around and place the peanut in the basket that the last person is carrying.

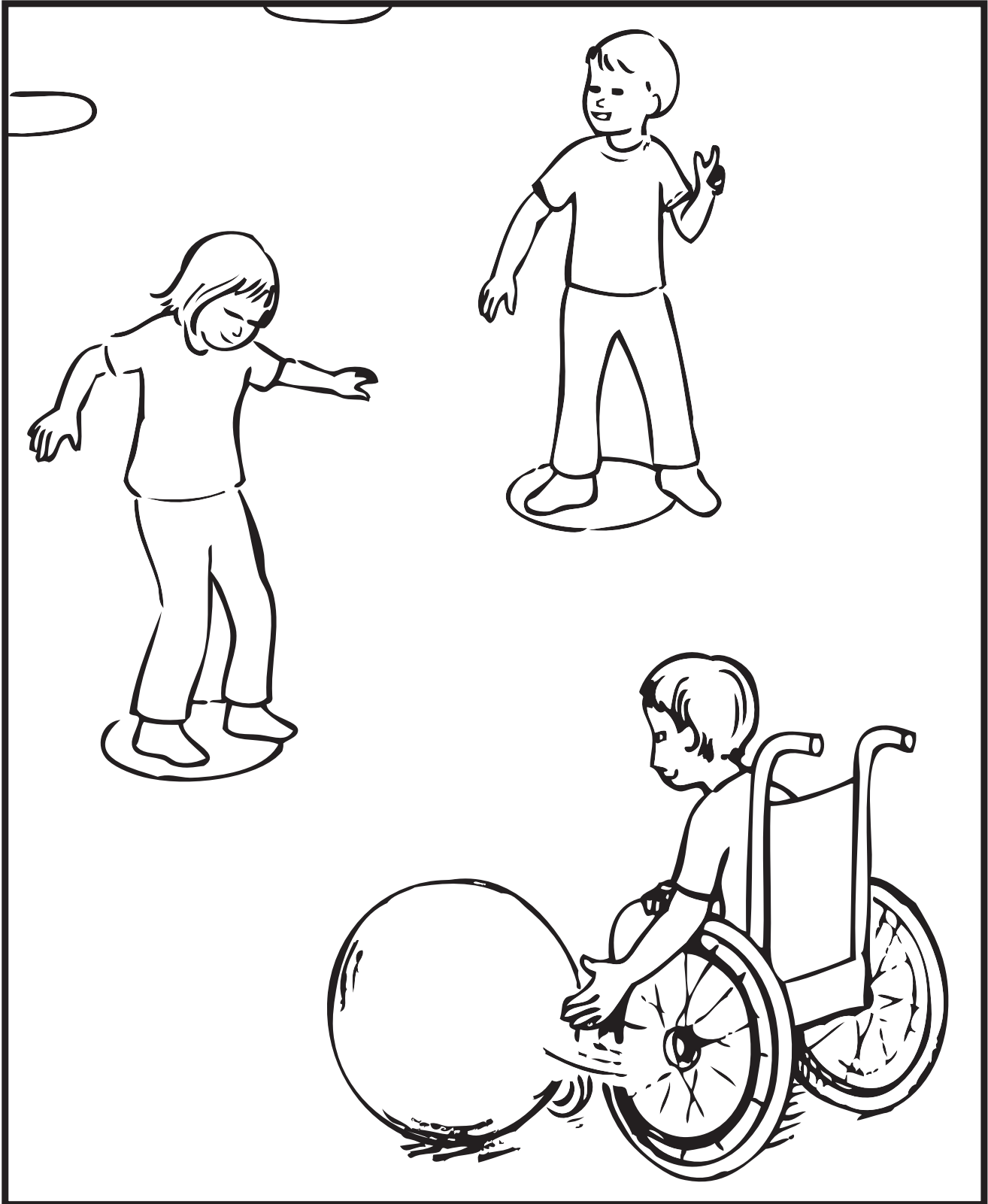
- Tips:**
1. To make this easier, pair the kids into sets of 2, as it is easier to “elephant walk” that way.
 2. To make this more challenging, make the peanuts the same color as the other objects in the environment (difficult to visually discriminate) and hide them in hard-to-find places.
 3. Make it a competition to find the most peanuts by having 2 teams.



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HUMAN BOWLING

Group Size: 4+

Materials: Ball (therapy ball)

Description: Spread all of the children out to act as the pins. One child rolls the ball and whomever it hits (one or more children will be out. Each player gets three rolls to try and get everyone out. A therapy ball or other large ball is ideal.

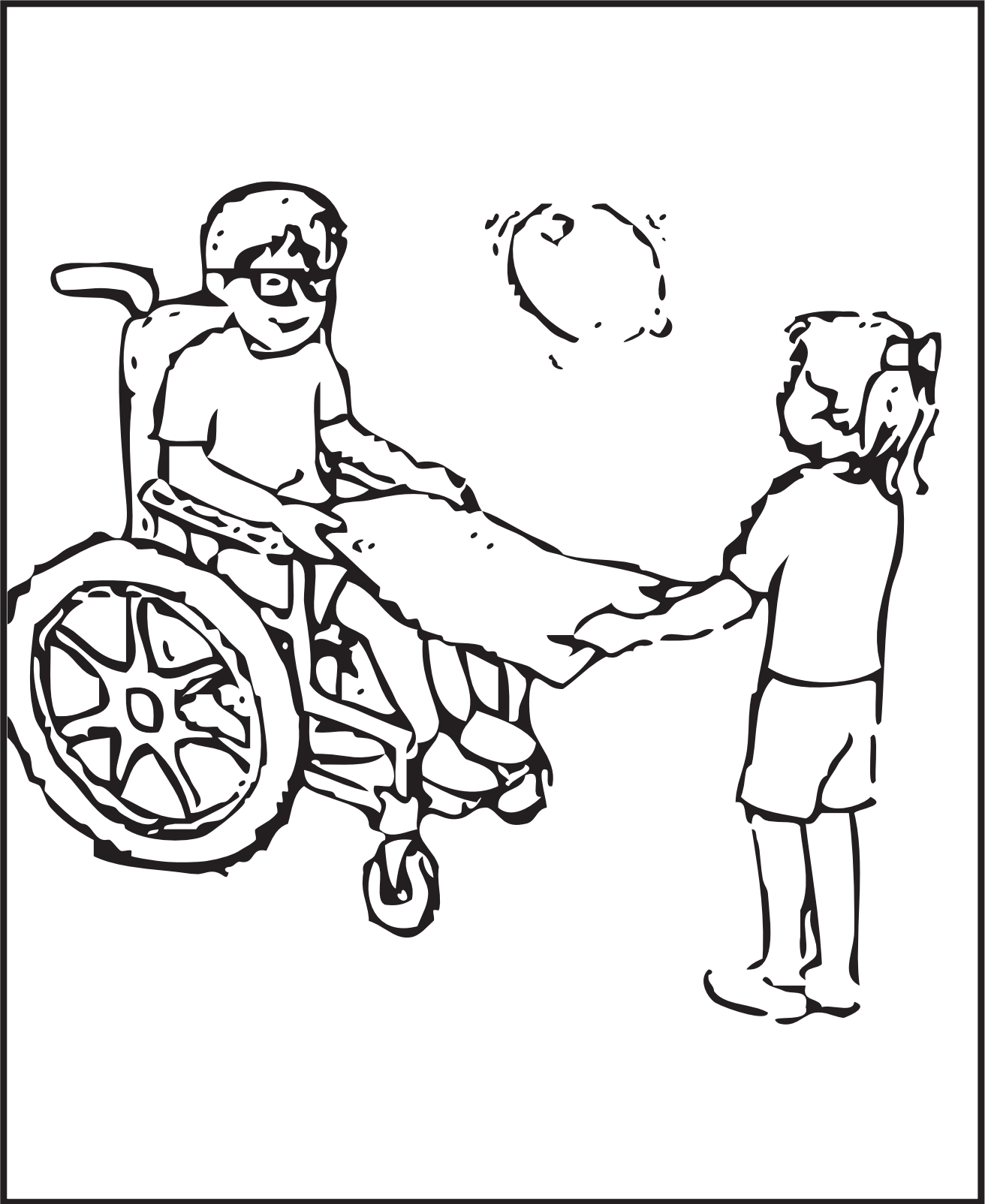
Tips: Use marks around the room to designate where the children (human pins) stand.



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TOWEL TOSS

Materials: Towel, balloon

Description: Hold one end of a towel while your child holds the other. Blow up a balloon and try to use the towel to keep the balloon in the air. Don't let it touch the ground!

- Tips:**
1. With a larger group, use a sheet and multiple balloons.
 2. If your child has trouble holding onto the towel, cut out slits for handles a few inches from the edge of the fabric or use duct tape to create handles for him to hold.



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